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Administrators' decisions and English teachers' expectations in conflict: a longitudinal qualitative case study

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Abstract

In this study, a private school of secondary education, department of English language teaching (ELT) was examined by interviewing the teachers through SWOT analysis data collection procedure. Every teacher (N=12) working for the ELT department was interviewed for at least 40 minutes. The first cycle of data collection was completed in the fall term of 2008-2009 academic year. The participants shared their notions on the education and institution. The results of theme analysis indicated that there existed a conflict between the ELT department and school managers. Within the SWOT analysis, the managers were indicated as a threat for the group of English teachers and English education. In the fall term of 2011-2012 academic year, the qualitative data collection procedure was repeated to reveal if any changes occurred in the meantime. The results indicated that the conflict was resolved with the dismissal of managerial team from the institution.

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Keywords: English language teaching, management, decision-making, expectations.

1. Introduction

Administrators, as the decision-makers on schools' internal procedures, rapport and resources, have an indirect effect over school and learner performance (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). They also have a crucial role in the construction of teachers' beliefs and motivation (Rosenholtz, 1985). One way of increasing teacher motivation by responding back to their expectations is suggested as teacher empowerment (Erlandson and Bifano, 1987; Lieberman, 1989, Peters and Austin, 1985). To Lieberman (1989), teacher empowerment is achieved by enabling practitioner participation in group decisions and by giving them real roles of decision-making in school community. Teachers' participation in decision-making enhances the connection between administrative parties and teachers, which leads to collectivism and teamwork (Sergiovanni, 1992, Jacobson and Berne, 1993). It also urges teachers to shoulder more responsibility about what happens in the school (Keith and Girling, 1991). Moreover, Petterson, Gok and Warren (1995) indicate about shared decision-making that teachers, as they are the closest to the classroom environment, are the best party that can make decisions about curriculum and teaching.

In the related literature, it is highlighted that the participation of teachers in decision-making leads to higher level of job satisfaction and commitment (Likert, 1967; Bredeson, 1989; Bacharach et al., 1990; Murphy and Beck, 1995).

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Supposing that teachers' expectations are met in relation to administrative appreciation of practitioner view, teachers are inclined to better develop devotion and connection with the institution they work for. As stated by Sarac (2011), when administrative units take teachers' expectations into consideration, teacher motivation is affected positively, which is closely linked with degree of job satisfaction.

Especially in centralized education systems, promoting teacher participation in decision-making process help administrators to achieve school-based management policy. School-based management paves the way to become decentralized and debureaucratized in terms of control and administration (Guthrie, 1986). Atasayar (2005) indicates that more than 70% of managers and supervisors think that Ministry of National Education in Turkey is supposed to give the authority of central institutions to local administrators, and educational system should be reorganized accordingly. Nevertheless, according to another research study with 388 participants of administrators and teachers in Ankara- Turkey, teachers do not think that they contribute to the decision-making process efficiently (Gulcan, 2011). Aksoy and Ural (2008) indicate that teachers in Turkey participate in decision-making procedure 'fairly well' when it is related with teaching but only 'a little' if it is related with school management. Neither administrators nor practitioners believe that they are sufficiently included in the decision-making mechanisms. Therefore, the target of this study is to identify the consequences of a case when there happens to be a conflict between administrators and teachers in terms of decision-making and expectations.

2. Methodology

In this study, a private school of secondary education, department of English language teaching (ELT) was examined by interviewing the teachers working there through SWOT analysis procedure. Every teacher working for the ELT department (N=12) was interviewed for at least 40 minutes. The first cycle of data collection was completed in the fall term of 2008-2009 academic year. The participants shared their notions on the education and institution. The results of theme analysis indicated that there existed a conflict between the ELT department and school managers. Within the SWOT analysis, the managers were indicated as a threat for the group of English teachers and English education. In the fall term of 2011-2012 academic year, the qualitative data collection procedure was repeated to reveal if any changes occurred in the meantime.

3. Findings

3.1. Strengths identified by teachers on education

Table 1. Teachers' evaluations on strengths

Strenghts	f	codes
Education	28	Skills-based, Support classes, Drama as an elective course, Low class population, Teaching English to young learners.
Teachers	18	Experienced, Eager, Educated, Willing, Hard-working, Dynamic, Young.
Materials	12	Archive, ELT resources.
Teacher-Student Relations	9	Sincere, Close, Caring, Giving importance.
Multi-level grades	5	Low-level students, Parents

The most frequently repeated (f=28) theme on strengths was the education given at the institution. The participants regarded it as a strong point since it was skills-based with support classes for less successful students. The classes with low population, teaching of English to young learners and providing 'Drama' as an elective course were the other codes identified by the teachers. The participants indicated that the teachers were another item (f=18) of strength, since they were experienced, eager, well-educated, willing, hard-working, dynamic and young. The third most repeated item was the teaching materials (f=12). The teachers mentioned that they had an archive of

materials at the department and they made use of different ELT resources. The teacher-student relations, which was described as sincere, close, caring and based on giving importance to students, was another strong point about education ($f=9$). The participating teachers stated that for the English courses, the students were grouped in four different classes according to their language proficiency levels. Therefore, same graders were given English classes in different language level sections. This application of 'same grade but multi-level sections' was regarded as an advantage by some participants for several times ($f=5$). They stated that it was advantageous for low-level students and the parents of such students appreciate it.

3.2. Weaknesses identified by teachers on education

Table 2. Teachers' evaluations on weaknesses

Weaknesses	f	codes
Conflict between managers and teachers	47	Insufficient communication, Loss of respect, Excluding from decision-making, Hierarchy, Degrading, Pressure.
Teachers' room	31	No room for ELT department, Result of the conflict, Degrading.
Multi-level grades	22	Ignoring successful students, Administrators' decision.
Workload	21	Teaching different levels, Teaching hours.
Technology	14	Need for computers, DVD players, smart-boards.

All the teachers stated that there existed a conflict between the administrators and teachers ($f=47$) working for the same institution. While defining the conflict, the participants indicated that there was insufficient communication between those two parties. The managers were stated to be disrespectful towards practitioners. Besides, the teachers did not think that they were included in the decision-making process. According to the participants' statements, there was a rigid hierarchy in management, which resulted in communication breakdown with the managers. The teachers found the managerial attitude as degrading and felt that they were under pressure at the work place.

Right after the theme 'conflict', the most repeated item of weakness was the 'teachers' room' ($f=31$). The participants indicated that they had a teachers' room for ELT practitioners only but the managers decided to take it back during the summer break without consulting it to the teachers and when the teachers came back to the school at the beginning of the new term, they found their belongings in another room that they have to share with all the other teachers. The participants regarded that decision as the result of the conflict that had been experienced between practitioners and managers, which was perceived by teachers as 'degrading'. The teachers indicated that a multi-level grade of four different sections was a weakness ($f=22$). The application of multi-level sections was stated to have ignored successful students in English language learning. It was stated to be an administrative decision that was taken without asking for practitioners' views. The workload ($f=22$) because of teaching different level of students for more than 25 hours of classes a week, and the need for technologically well-equipped classes ($f=14$) were the other items indicated by the teachers.

3.3. Opportunities/Expectations identified by the teachers

Instead of sharing their identifications on the opportunities at the school, the participants preferred to state what they expected from the school management. The participants emphasized that having met the teachers' expectations and made changes at the school accordingly, the managers would provide a school atmosphere for opportunities.

Table 3. Teachers' expectations

Expectations	f	codes
Increasing job satisfaction and motivation	43	Work load, Communication, Teachers' room, Change of attitude, Technology, Recruiting teachers.

The participants highlighted the theme ‘job satisfaction and motivation’ ($f=43$). Their expectations related with the theme were less work load, maintaining communication with managers, having a teachers’ room again, recruiting teachers for the ELT department and technologically equipped classrooms.

3.4. Threads identified by the teachers

Table 4. Teachers’ evaluations on threats

Threats	F	codes
Administration	52	Attitude, Relations, Decision-making.
Working conditions	43	Insecure, No teachers’ room, Hierarchy, Physical conditions.
Multi-level grades	27	Inequality, Disadvantageous, Future results.

The teachers identified the administration as a threat ($f=52$). They stated that the administration had a ‘negative’ attitude towards practitioners, the relations between those two units were insufficient and inefficient, the administration excluded teachers from decision making and imposed sanctions on teachers. The working conditions were also another theme emphasized as a threat (43). The participants found the conditions as insecure and indicated that there existed a hierarchy between managers and practitioners. They did not find the physical conditions sufficient for teaching and repeated that they needed a teachers’ room for ELT department. The teachers also indicated that grouping students into four different sections of language levels was a threat ($f=27$). They stated that it caused inequality for learning opportunities provided to students. It was regarded as disadvantageous especially for low-level students, since it would be impossible for them to catch up with the higher level students as time passed. Besides, the teachers highlighted that such an application would result in graduate students with completely different language proficiency levels in the future.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

According to the results of this study, the practitioners indicated a conflict they experienced with the administrators. The change of administrative unit with new personnel functioned as a solution for this case in the long term of two-year time. The findings emphasize the importance and necessity of administration communicating with the teachers about their expectations to increase motivation (Sarac, 2011).

In terms of insufficient inclusion of practitioners in decision-making, the results of this study support the findings in other research studies done in Turkey by Aytac (2000), and Karakose and Kocabas (2006). Nevertheless, in this longitudinal study, the findings signify that excluding teachers from decision-making and having conflicts with them might result in questioning the place and efficiency of managers and lead to the change of administrative personnel, who are the principal, two vice-principals and an academic coordinator. As stated by Aksay and Ural (2008), such a result might be based on the issue that the selected case was a private school of secondary education. Thus, the same result of changes in the administrative unit might not be expected in state schools and further research is needed to overview the stability of administration related to teacher expectations and job satisfaction.

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